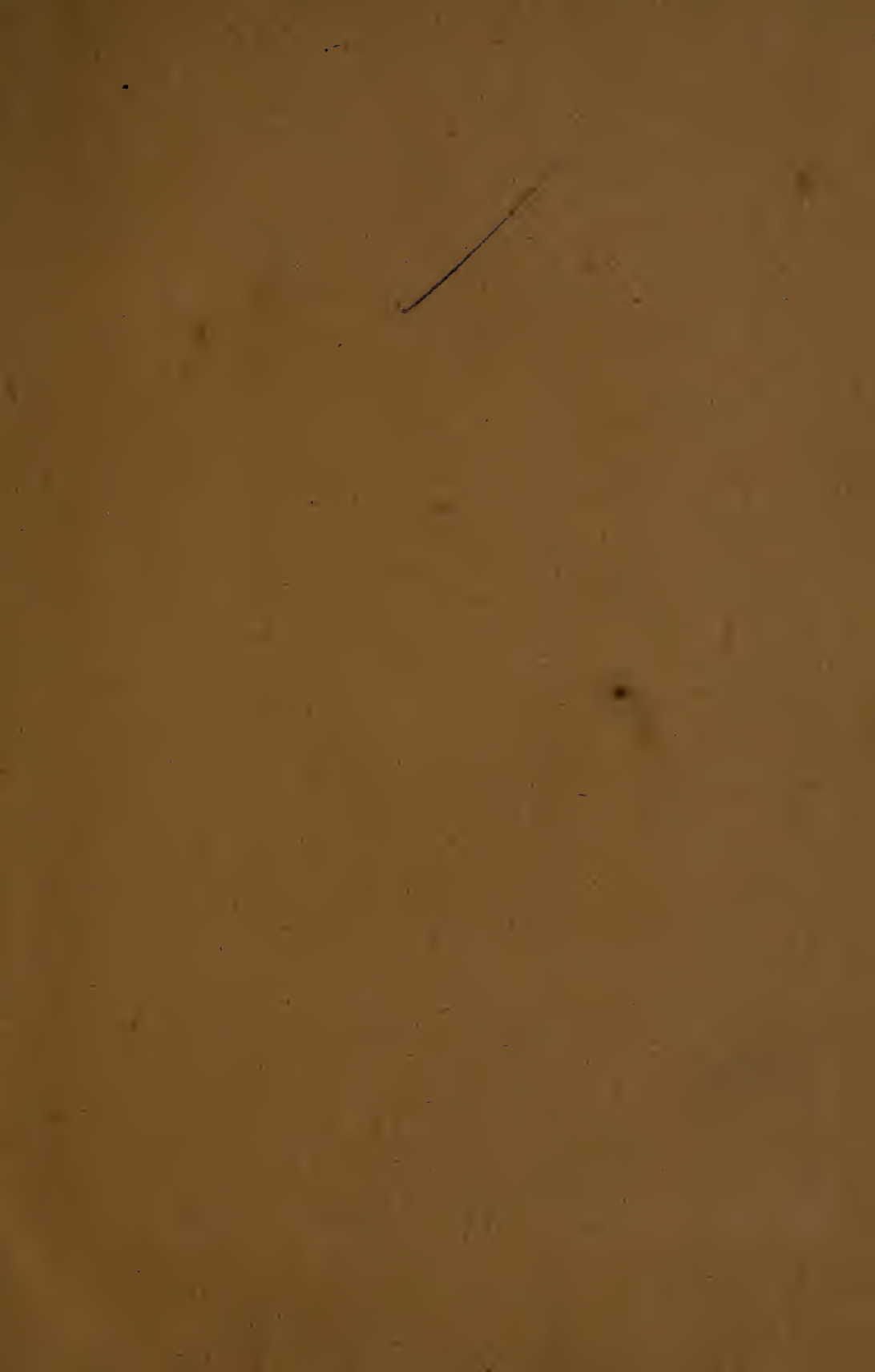
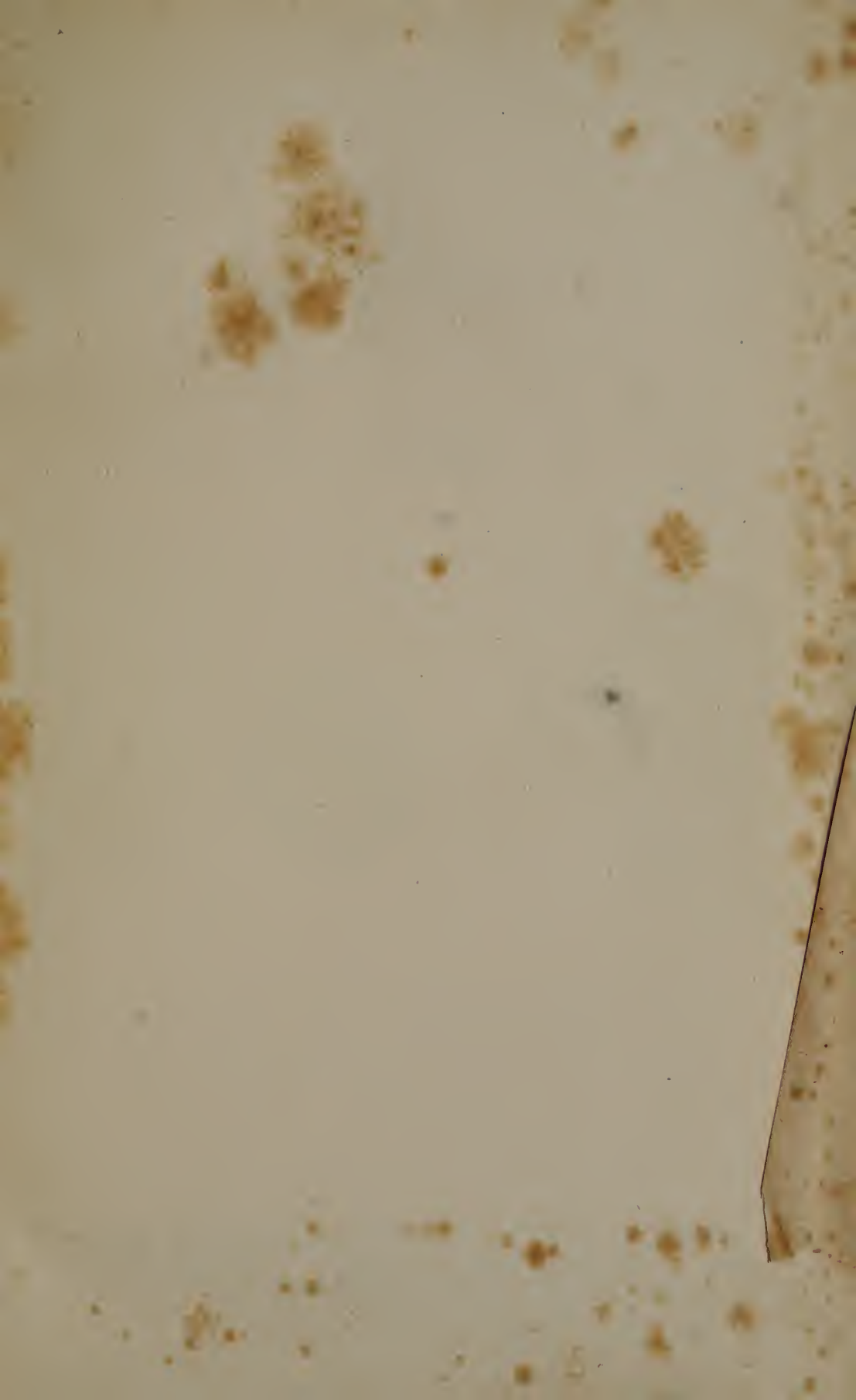


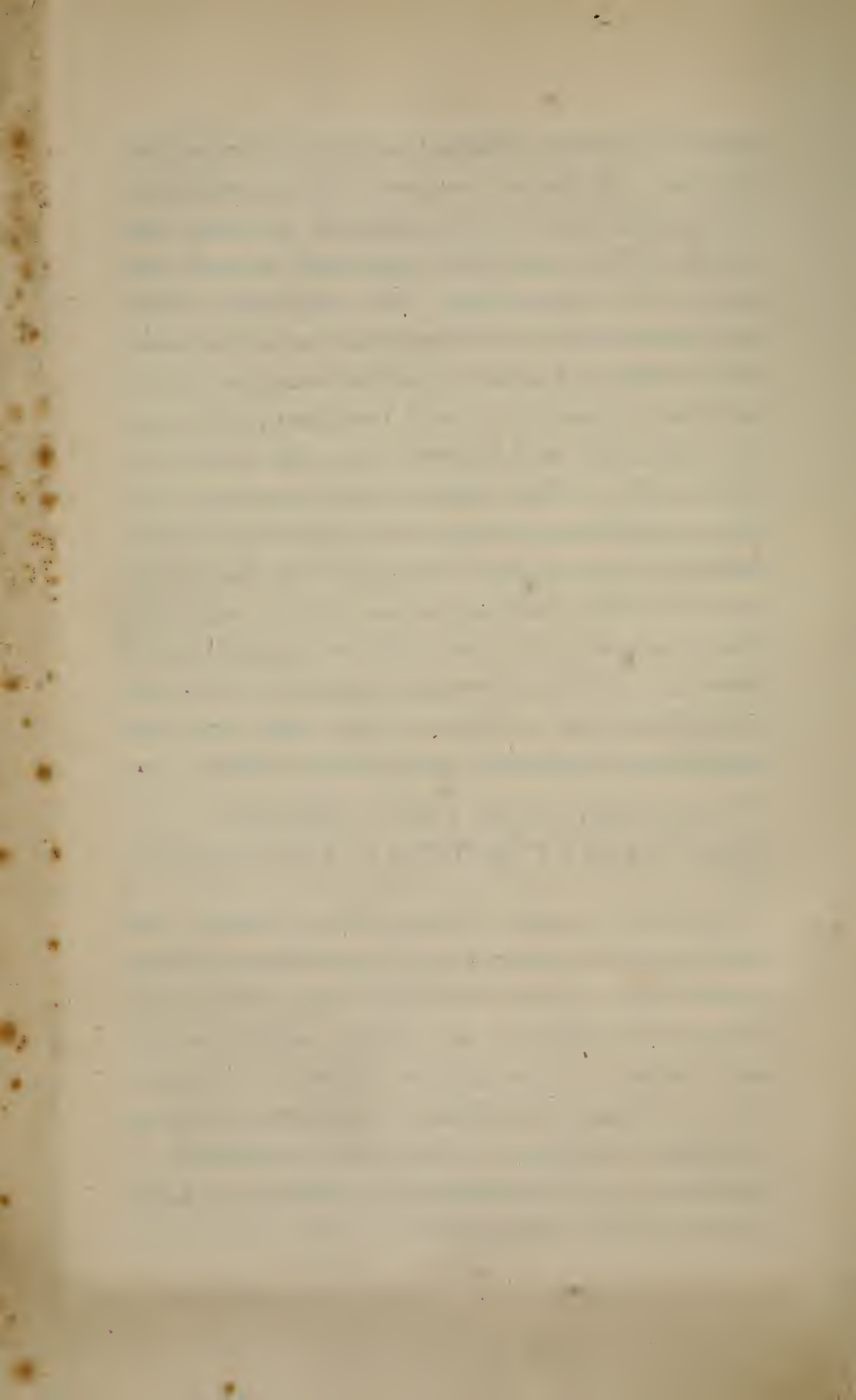


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MR. GRANT DUFF

ON THE

TEACHINGS OF RICHARD COBDEN:

DECEMBER 20, 1871.



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MR. GRANT DUFF

ON THE

TEACHINGS OF RICHARD COBDEN.

1871.

ON Wednesday night, Dec. 20, Mr. Grant Duff, M.P., Under Secretary of State for India, met his constituents in the Corn Market Hall at Elgin, and delivered his annual address.

Provost CAMERON was in the chair.

Mr. GRANT DUFF, after some remarks on the illness of the Prince of Wales, said—

Since the general election of 1868, Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet has, as in duty bound, taken up one after another those questions upon which the Liberal party distinctly expressed its opinion on that occasion. Most of them it has had the good fortune to settle, and there can be but little doubt that early in the ensuing session it will put out of hand those with which it has tried to deal, but has not yet dealt successfully. It must be admitted by all, whether they approve or condemn what has been done, that vast changes have been made, changes the like of which have been rarely accom-

Work done
in the last
three years.

plished in so short a time without violent political disturbances, accompanied not seldom by the shedding of blood.

Fresh point
of political
departure.

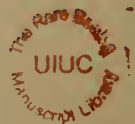
When an Education Bill for Scotland and a Ballot Bill for the United Kingdom have been passed, we shall have arrived at the edge of a new country, and must take a fresh point of political departure.

Forecasts
in 1868.

I said to you in 1868—"During the next generation I am fully persuaded that all our institutions will be asked, so to speak, to re-state the reasons of their existence, and be judged according to their capacity for furthering the common weal. So averse are our countrymen to all change not manifestly necessary, that such of those institutions as have historical right upon their side will not find it difficult to conform to the exigencies of the new time; but woe unto those which are determinedly obstructive! Woe unto those whose friends are rash enough to say 'Let them be as they are, or let them not be at all.' Such obstinate institutions will soon hear the ominous words, 'Too late'—words now sounding in the ears of that Irish Establishment which so fondly imagined that its dangers were at an end with the failure of the Appropriation clause."

These were
correct.

I think the events of the last three years have proved my anticipations to have been correct. Institution after institution which used to be considered almost as part of the order of nature has been asked somewhat peremptorily, from the plat-



form or through the press, to re-state the reasons of its existence, but I am happy to say that not one of them has, as would have been the case in the old days, answered the inevitable challenge with an absolute refusal of any adaptation or change.

No institution has refused all change.

The result of this has been, that against none of the questioned institutions has any strong public feeling been excited.

Results.

This is the case even with the House of Lords, which has been perhaps more loudly challenged than any other. The popular mind, if I read the signs of the times aright, is not only prepared, but anxious to have proposals submitted to it for such a change in the House of Lords as may make it a more working body, a better helpmate for the House of Commons in doing the tremendously heavy and ever-increasing business of the nation; but the popular mind is, I think, very far from having determined that anything like revolutionary change is required in that ancient body.

No violent desire for organic change.

House of Lords.

So again with the Established Churches of North and South Britain. A section of the Non-conformists, under the able leadership of Mr. Miall, has not been slow to apply to them the reasoning which led it so ardently to desire the downfall of the Irish Establishment. But although I cannot doubt, as I have before said to you, that the set of the current of the time is everywhere against Church Establishments, yet in the southern part of the kingdom a thousand circumstances

Established Churches.

tend to make the Church Establishment so strong that most Liberal politicians, having regard to the importance of method in politics as in all things else, and having regard also to possibilities of transformation, would do, as it seems to me, most wisely to turn, at least for some, perhaps for many years to come, to other matters. I do not say *all* Liberal politicians. Mr. Miall, for example, could not do otherwise than he has done without being untrue to his own principles, and he fulfils a most important function. It would be against the nature of things for the feeling of hostility to Church Establishments felt by large masses of our countrymen not to be represented, and powerfully represented, in the House of Commons; but Mr. Miall and his friends should give to many who vote against him as much credit as we do to him. We have not all the same duties at the same time. 1871 is not 1863, when the Irish Establishment still stood like a rock (in that summer one of the closest and wisest observers of English politics whom I know told me he thought it would last twenty years), and when the attack on the unjust and vexatious tests at the English universities had only just been begun in Parliament by Mr. Dodson, Mr. Goschen, and myself.

Other insti-
tutions.

I need not go on to the other institutions which have of late received warnings. There is not one of them which, by making timely, and in some instances very slight changes, may not secure for itself peace and quietness. There is not anywhere a sign of a desire on the part of the country that

statesmen should for many a day do any *large* piece of destructive work. There is nothing worth mentioning that must go speedily, root and branch, like the Irish Establishment and the purchase system; but observe, I do not say storms may not arise. They will arise if reforms are not set about, and the House of Lords especially has no time to lose. Proposals for a moderate and serious reform should be early made, and made from within that assembly.

Well, but if organic changes are not called for, what is called for? If, by what is called for, I am understood to mean what I personally, speaking as member for Elgin, and not as connected with any Administration or set of persons whatever, think would be the best thing for the country, I should reply the taking up, not by the Government, not by isolated members of the Liberal party, but by the Liberal party as a whole, of the legacy which was left to the party as a whole by Mr. Cobden.

If organic change not called for, what called for?

Acceptance of the legacy of Mr. Cobden.

By the legacy of Mr. Cobden I mean that policy which was inaugurated by the repeal of the Corn Laws, the policy of Free Trade or Free Exchange in its widest sense; the policy which takes for granted that the country has made up its mind to get rid in home matters of all trammels upon industry, and to get rid in foreign matters of the old evil ways of national jealousies, huge armaments, artificial arrangements for securing the balance of power, and, in short, of the whole course of conduct which was based on the idea

What was it?

that nations should act in the spirit of the old rhyme—

“As I walked by myself, I said to myself,
And the self-same self said to me,
‘Look out for yourself, take care of yourself,
For nobody cares for thee.’”—

the policy, in other words, which substitutes international co-operation for international hostility.

Mr. Cobden died too early to put his policy before the nation in a form so clear, so connected, and so concise as to be at once apprehended by all. I confess that I, for one, did not, during the first few years that I sat in Parliament, clearly understand the way in which his ideas hung together. Since his death the Cobden Club has done, amongst several good pieces of work, one pre-eminently good piece of work. It has published two volumes of Mr. Cobden’s writings, two volumes of his speeches, and a most masterly essay by Sir Louis Mallet, which contains the very expressed essence of Mr. Cobden’s thoughts. I cannot understand how any member of the Liberal party, after studying these works with an open mind, can fail to come to the conclusion—Here we have, traced most clearly, the chief lines on which should be built, *for some time to come*, the policy of this nation.

Action of the
Cobden
Club.

Other things
required to
be done.

But this
very urgent.

There are other things to be done, no doubt—this and that institution to be made more in harmony with modern requirements, and so forth—but *these* are the things requiring to be done, which

will make most difference to the prosperity of our people as a whole.

Now, let us see what the acceptance of Mr. Cobden's policy, as the most important part of the Liberal programme, would involve.

What involved in acceptance of Mr. Cobden's legacy.

Diminution of indirect taxation.

First, it would involve a further diminution of indirect taxation. We have had a great deal taken off our indirect taxation of late years ; but still we are raising off our trade, in the midst of what is called a *régime* of Free Trade, an enormous sum of money, some forty-two millions at least. We cannot hope in our lives to get rid of anything like all the burdens on our trade, for the extravagance of the past—an extravagance, alas ! to which, let flatterers and deceivers say what they will, all classes, from the lowest to the highest, were parties—has mortgaged not only the property, but the industry of our people ; yet we may still very considerably diminish it, and I heartily trust we may : for whether you diminish or whether you abolish an indirect tax, in one way or other, the doing so creates a far greater amount of prosperity than the mere remission of an equal amount of direct taxation. Looking to what is passing on the other side of the Atlantic, we must be prepared to see America half a generation hence, in spite of all that unwise fiscal legislation can do to prevent her prosperity, becoming a more and more formidable competitor with us in all peaceful ways. Now, it seems to me that it is vitally essential to England that she should remain the great workshop of the world. If we are to keep that position, we must go

on year by year loosing every band that still hampers our industry. Of course there are difficulties in the way of this. It is not easy to find perfectly just substitutes for the taxes you take off, if you must find substitutes at all : but we have really no choice in the matter ; we must go on freeing our labour, and making England a better and better place for the skilled artisan to live in, or we must be content, as education improves, and the facilities for travelling increase, to see him go elsewhere.

Reply to a political objection.

There is a class of politicians which is apprehensive that direct taxation would be used as a means for imposing unfair burdens upon the rich, and which deprecates for that political reason steps which it admits to be financially desirable. I do not share those apprehensions. If there were any disposition on the part of the masses of our countrymen to rob their more fortunate brethren by unfair legislation, what is to prevent their doing so now ? They have the power. If any such apprehension is well founded, then the policy of the Liberal party for these many years has been a huge mistake ; since that policy is based on the assumption that the majority of the electorate will in all great matters act wisely, after those great matters have been subjected to the close and searching examination which all great matters receive in this country from Parliament and the press.

Must we find substitutes for all indirect taxation ?

But supposing we make up our minds gradually to take off all indirect taxes except those on tobacco and certain liquors, is it so clear that we must find substitutes for all or many of them ?

Since England was England there never was a moment when our position was less assailable.

Strong
position of
England at
this moment.
France.

Of course, we all sympathise very deeply with France, but it is idle to deny that France up to July, 1870, might, if she had pleased, have given us a great deal of trouble; and although from 1860 onwards the anti-English feeling was steadily on the decline in that country, the rivalry of the two nations had continued for so many centuries, and had been so bitter, that it would have been easy for any ruler of France to have got up quite as strong a feeling in favour of war with England as there was last year, before the reverses began, in favour of war with Germany: but the danger from France is gone and passed for many a long year. If any man tells me that France will soon be again what she was, I venture to disagree with him. There are great recuperative forces in that country, but in order to give those recuperative forces any chance you must have three things, none of which you will have. First, abnegation of the policy of revenge. Secondly, extensive disarmament. Thirdly, free trade.

Now if there is no danger from France, from what quarter, in the name of common sense, is there danger? The bare idea of there being danger from Germany is so ridiculous that it is hardly possible to speak of it with patience. If you heard a man from Bremen or Stettin, or any place on the German coast, talking with alarm about a possible hostile descent from England, you would think him an idiot. But it would be much easier for us to make a descent on the coast of

Germany.

Germany than it would be for the Germans to make a descent on our coast. Even if the thing were possible, I can only say that if the spirit and skill which defeated the Armada is so dead amongst us as to let a single hostile boat's crew be landed on our shore, except for the purpose of being walked off to the nearest gaol, we don't deserve to keep our independence. There was a certain amount of silly talk in Germany during the war about punishing England for her supposed delinquencies, but that was all idle chatter. The German *quidnunc* is just as great a fool as the foolishlest Briton, just as alarmist, just as unaccustomed, perhaps more unaccustomed, to make allowances for foreign nations. The position of a neutral is always difficult. He is exposed to abuse from both sides, and most fortunate is he when he is not dragged into war; but, behind all this superficial irritation, there is, on the part of all really well-informed and sensible German politicians, a firm conviction that the most cordial union and close friendship between Germany and England is a matter of vital importance to Europe. Short-sighted, indeed, must he be who does not discern that days are coming when a perfectly good understanding between these two countries will make all the difference as to whether the Continent is to be convulsed from end to end or is to remain at peace. Let momentary irritation be what it may, England and Germany *must* hold together. They cannot avoid doing so if they would. The force of circumstances would be too strong for

them. But supposing all this were different, supposing that the interests of Germany and of England, the interests, in other words, of peace, were not inextricably bound up together, supposing she were your enemy, I defy any man to show how it would be necessary for us to maintain one battalion that it would not be right for us to maintain for other reasons.

Well, if the country is convinced, as I hope it may be in a year or two, that there is no longer any fear from France, and that there never was nor will be any fear from Germany, we shall see a cold fit set in about armaments.

Probability of a cold fit about armaments.

I hope that fit will not go too far. We must have an adequate army, and by all means let us take advantage of the present hot fit, as is, indeed, being excellently done, to make a middling army into a first-rate one. A bad army is nothing but a school of demoralisation. A middling army is a school of very little good. A first-rate army, whether you ever want it for war or not, may be made a school for producing, no doubt at enormous expense, but still for producing, a vast number of persons extremely available for the general purposes of the nation. But when we have once made our army as good in quality as it can be—the best army of its size in the world—I trust we shall take care that its numbers in time of peace are as small as is consistent with the only purposes for which we want an army—the garrisoning of certain fortresses like Malta and Gibraltar—the maintenance of our rule in India—

Must not go too far.

Necessity for an adequate army.

the support of the civil power in Ireland always, and now and then for an hour or two at home—the very improbable contingency of having to send a small force abroad, and the more improbable contingency of having to repel some attack on our shores, if the once glorious, and, as I still believe, incomparable navy of England turns out to be worthless.

Before we have done re-organising our army, I hope the time may arrive for attempting by diplomatic action to get other nations to make large reductions in their armaments. Now, as for years past, the only difficulty in doing so will be with France. Now, as any time since 1851, the frank adoption of the policy of moderate disarmament in France would be followed all through Europe. Of that there seems no chance at present; but in the existing state of France, events are at any time possible which might make her unwillingness to disarm less important to other nations than would be the case now. It was Mr. Cobden's wish to bring about a limitation of the excessive armaments of Europe by diplomatic negotiation, and he continually pointed to our arrangements with America, as to the limitation of the number of vessels on the Canadian lakes, as a specimen of the course of proceeding which he desired to see adopted. This idea has been put forward in various forms within the last few years. In 1868, negotiations between members of Parliament in most of the leading countries of Europe, with a view to simultaneous motions for partial disarmament being made in

But re-
duction of
armaments
to be sought
for by diplo-
matic means.

their respect legislatures, had gone a long way. The present is, as I have said, clearly not a very happy moment, thanks to the state of feeling in France; but, depend upon it, this scheme of Mr. Cobden's will come up again and again till it is effected, and the statesman who will get it done on a great scale will be *the* statesman of the next thirty years. To restore to the pursuits of industry if it were only a million, say one in four, of the European hands that are now being trained to war—that is, to the destruction of the fruits of industry—to “mischief,” as Bentham called it, “on the greatest scale”—would be the biggest piece of diplomatic work which has been done in our time.

Further, the acceptance of Mr. Cobden's legacy would imply a desire for a more distinct statement than has been made for many a long day by any English Minister as to what are and what are not the aims of our foreign policy.

More distinct statement as to foreign policy wanted.

Now, there are some persons who think that it is part of our business to have our hands everywhere redressing injuries, and that we should act the part of a sort of earthly Providence. This is the view, for example, which is advocated with great ability and zeal by the *Spectator*, a newspaper which I assiduously read and greatly admire, but with that view I entirely disagree. It seems to me that it is no sort of business of ours to be “man's stout defence from wrong,” and that, even if it were, it is a business of which, in the present state of the world, we should make very little. I am far, indeed, from saying that it would be im-

Sacredness of treaty engagements.

possible to put a case in which it would be the duty of this country to interfere by force of arms in favour of this or that cause, wholly irrespective of treaty engagements, or our own interests; but it would be quite impossible to put such a case without assuming the occurrence of events which are so violently improbable that for practical purposes they may be left out of calculation.

But what are our treaty engagements?

Of course treaty engagements are treaty engagements, and we cannot leave out of calculation the fact that we have a certain number of treaty engagements which might oblige us in certain eventualities to go to war, however little we liked it; but let any man who makes a conscientious study of contemporary events take those treaty engagements and read them quietly through, and he will, I think, agree with me that the prospects of our having to go to war under the provisions of any one of them are by no means great. Still, in thinking out a system of foreign policy, the chance cannot be disregarded. Common sense, however, surely points out that no one is bound to an impossibility; the most needy or exacting ally can only expect us to do the best we can, being what we are. He cannot expect that we should make the whole of our national life and policy turn upon the possibility of our one day having to assist him.

British fleet.

For motives quite unconnected with our alliances, it suits us to have the finest fleet in the world. Our ally has then the right to ask that, in the event of its becoming our duty to assist him under our treaty engagements, he should have the

fullest assistance that our maritime supremacy can give.

Then we are not absolutely rich, for I cannot think that a country in which the average income of all its inhabitants, men, women, and children, is below rather than above £30 per annum deserves to be called absolutely rich ; but compared to other nations we are unquestionably rich. I rack my brain without success to think of any probable combination of European events in which the assistance of an English force, even if that force consisted of men each worth two of any other army, would be half so useful to our allies as money.

British
money.

The national sentiment might require that a small British force should actually take part in some Continental campaign ; but, under the existing conditions of Europe, that force, even if it were composed of paladins, could not produce any great result. In former wars we did much more by subsidies than by the actual sending of troops, and now that the armies of the Continent have become so enormous and so well appointed, it will be surely much more than ever wise for us to operate upon land rather with gold than with steel. If this be true, then the keeping up of any larger force than what we require for the defence of our own shores, and the other purposes to which I have alluded, might be represented as not only not necessary, but as a direct injury, to our allies. I say nothing of the immense indirect importance of having the countenance of a people like ours, which has

British flag.

really now on the continent of Europe no interest whatever except that nations should remain at peace, and increase alike in material wealth and in all the higher forms of well-being. Even now our moral support counts for much; and every foreign statesman worthy of the name knows that moral support is worth, in the long run, many battalions. When you see the contrary asserted, you may safely conclude that the assertor, if he does not speak in mere ignorance, is trying to pique us into a course of action favourable to his own interests, or is speaking under the influence of irritation caused by our not exerting our moral influence in the direction in which he wishes to see it exerted.

This is true even now in most cases, but it would be uniformly true if we took as much care as we should that our opinions upon the conflicting interests of foreign nations were always formed on thoroughly sound information. It is not so, however. The duty of keeping the public mind clearly informed about these matters is not sufficiently recognised as a duty by those whose duty it is to lead the national thought in these matters. There hangs about this side of our affairs too much of the last century spirit. That spirit was perfectly in its place when the relations of nations were settled not by nations but by courts. I am quite aware that the influence of courts, or rather of the two or three persons who are centres of courts, is still far greater than is often supposed, or than they will be, perhaps, thirty years hence; but the power of public opinion is enormously great too, and

British moral support.

That moral support would be stronger if we were better informed.

public opinion even in this country, where it is far more powerful than in most places, is not sufficiently, I will not say directed, for it will direct itself—but informed, since what is wanted is in most cases simply a clear statement of the real facts; and far, far more than has been done in this way by any Government whose proceedings I have watched might be done, I cannot help thinking, without the slightest indiscretion. From what I have said now, and often before, you will understand that I am as far as possible from repudiating one jot or one tittle of our national engagements. I do not deny that we *may* have to use force, in quarrels which do not directly concern us, in obedience to our solemn promises; but I firmly believe that if our diplomatic service were considered a matter of first-class national concern—were considered of at least as much importance as either the army or the navy, although it costs what in comparison to the cost of these services is a mere pittance, and if it were worked in all respects as the exigencies of 1871, as distinguished from those of 1771, require, no question in which we are interested under any treaty engagement would ever be allowed to reach the stage when war is inevitable, while the chances of any difference between European nations coming to a war would be indefinitely diminished.

It is often said that the days of diplomacy are past. If by diplomacy is meant the diplomacy of endless formalities and trickery, of gold-headed canes and snuff-boxes—the kind of diplomacy

The days of true diplomacy are only beginning.

at which Horace Walpole sneered five quarters of a century ago—I am quite of that opinion; but the day of real diplomacy—the art, that is, not only of preventing misunderstandings between nations, but of making them mutually helpful—the art of international co-operation, then I take leave to say that diplomacy in that sense is only beginning.

I entirely agree with every word of the following passage, which I take from the evidence given before a committee of the House of Commons by one of the greatest masters of diplomacy in this higher sense:—"I am of opinion that diplomacy will become one of the most powerful engines for the promotion of peace and good relations. At the present moment we look to armies to establish peace and goodwill among Christians; but I am sure diplomacy will be a better engine when properly developed and organised." Not less true were Mr. Odo Russell's observations about having, not points for diplomatic action, but centres of political information dotted about the world. "The more feelers," he said, "you have all over the civilised world, the better informed you are, and the more influence you can exercise; and I think that through an organisation of that kind you are more likely to establish peace and goodwill among Christians than you are through armies, Armstrong guns, breechloaders, Minié bullets, and so on."

Mr. Odo
Russell.

The real In-
ternational
Society.

We hear much talk nowadays of the new organisation called the International Society,

which is to pull down all that stands upright. In so far as this International Society represents anything except anarchy, it represents a vast amount of perfectly reasonable dissatisfaction at the present unreasonable state of things in Europe, where every nation is standing with the sword in one hand and a protective tariff, like a target, in the other. The schemes of the so-called International Society, for regenerating the world, are based on absolute ignorance or disregard of the economic laws by which the world is governed. That being so, we know that the end of them must be to perish and come to naught, after no doubt causing more or less bloodshed and destruction of property in this or that place ; but if one diplomatist in ten understood the capabilities of his art as well as Mr. Russell, you would have the diplomatic body throughout the world a ready-made old International Society, whose action would gradually sweep away all those anomalies and absurdities against which the doings of the new International Society are a sort of blundering protest.

I think our Foreign Office should be a vast engine for collecting political information throughout the world ; for communicating such parts of that information as it is right to communicate, through Parliament and in other ways, to the country, in order that public opinion may be always ready intelligently to back up your Foreign Minister in promoting always and everywhere peace and goodwill, and mutual helpfulness amongst nations, and in limiting the area of dis-

The Foreign
Office

turbance where tendencies so hostile to each other are in presence that their differences can only be settled by war.

To have thus acted on public opinion in this country twenty years ago would have been extremely difficult, because in almost every country in Europe you had struggles going on about principles with regard to which public opinion in this country was divided. It is not so now. The party of the reaction, which was supreme in 1851, has been defeated along the whole line. The great questions which are open now are not questions of principle. There is no question of principle, about which our people care, open between Germany and France. There is no question of principle, about which our people care, open in Italy. There is none open in Austria. There is none open in Turkey. All the questions that are coming up in European politics, and, I am sure, there are enough of them, with the exception of the question between France and Germany, which is a mere question of revenge, are composite questions, which require much study even to comprehend them. They are not questions on which public opinion will ever be so strongly and suddenly moved as to make it call for wrong action, if only the true facts are set before it sufficiently early in the day.

I say, then, take every honourable opportunity to diminish the number of those engagements which may force you to go to war. Contract no new ones if it is possible to avoid it. Let your

Contrast of
1871 and
1851.

Recapitula-
tion of
foreign
policy.

allies know distinctly what your support means, so that they may not be led into danger by imagining that your goodwill to them has no limits. Multiply your points of information. Help public opinion by communicating whatever can with advantage be communicated to it, and proclaim to all mankind that your Foreign Office wishes for no influence in the Councils of Europe, except what it must derive from being absolutely disinterested and supremely well informed.

Had Mr. Cobden lived, his voice would doubtless have been heard in the recent discussions about the proposed modifications of his own great Treaty—the French Commercial Treaty of 1860. The policy which he then inaugurated has been so successful that, as has been said, “all the great nations of Europe—England, France, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Austria, and the Zollverein—form, for trading purposes, a compact International body, from which the principle of monopoly and exclusive privilege has been almost entirely eliminated.” I do not know how far the negotiations now going on under the unhappy initiative of M. Thiers may alter this state of things, but till the French madness of 1870 nothing could be fairer than the prospect; and one’s only wish was to see some of the countries that lagged behind, such as Spain and Portugal, included in the same commercial state system.

Mr. Cobden
and commer-
cial treaties.

There are few things which Mr. Cobden had more at heart than a reform in our existing land laws. Some of you may remember the very strong language which he used on this subject in the last

Mr. Cobden
and the
land laws.

speech which he ever delivered, and it is strange that it has never occurred to any one to follow up the hint which he then gave, and to have a League for the reform of the land laws, like the Anti-Corn-Law League. Proposals have indeed been put forward for dealing in strange ways with the land—proposals which Sir John Lubbock, one of our best financial authorities, very clearly showed, the other day, would result in saddling the State with a deficit of some fifty millions per annum; but I need hardly say that Mr. Cobden would have had no sympathy with foolish dreams like this—dreams which are excusable enough in persons who know nothing of the land except what they read in books, but would have been inexcusable in a man who, born and bred in Sussex, understood the agricultural phase of English life just as well as its manufacturing and commercial phases. I wish, by the way, some of our literary would-be land-reformers would set about informing themselves about the land in the same spirit in which our distinguished countryman Mr. Finlay, the historian of modern Greece, set to work informing himself about Greek taxation. He farmed the taxes of a district, exposing himself to all the annoyances and all the losses which must inevitably fall upon a foreigner who attempts such a thing in such a country, solely and simply that he might see how the present dreadful system works in practice, and what could be substituted for it. But to return to Mr. Cobden. All he proposed was to sweep away, as quickly as they could without injustice be swept

away, all those artificial fetters on the transfer of land which hinder its passing from hand to hand according to the natural laws of trade. Of course you can't make an estate as easily transferable as a diamond or an ingot of gold, but the object of our land legislation should be to approach that ideal as nearly as possible. Not until the ordinary economic forces are allowed to work with regard to land as freely as the nature of things permits, will the land do as much for our national well-being as it ought to do. But there we must stop. No attempt, as in France, to impose another set of artificial restrictions which work quite as badly as our artificial restrictions. Free trade applied to land—nothing more, nothing less. Once let us have this, and our unwise land customs, which are even more mischievous than our unreformed land legislation, will gradually pass away.

There is one thing more which Mr. Cobden greatly desired, about which he wrote largely, and which he considered a corollary to our free trade policy, I mean the re-consideration of the whole subject of belligerent rights at sea. Mr. Cobden thought that our commerce had now grown to such an enormous size that, let us make our navy as powerful as we would, it was idle to suppose that we could give anything like effective protection to that commerce in time of war. He thought that any loss we might suffer in warlike efficiency, from not being able to prey upon the commerce of an enemy, would be as nothing compared to the advantage which we should gain

Belligerent
rights at sea.

by not having our own commerce preyed upon. I spoke to you at considerable length on this subject in 1862, and I re-published in the spring of this year what I then said.* What I thought then I think now. To adopt the policy advocated by Mr. Cobden would be to take a most momentous step, a step about which responsible statesmen may well pause and think—as Mr. Gladstone said the other day about another matter—“once, twice, and even thrice” before taking it. It may be that there is some answer to Mr. Cobden, but if there be, all I can say is that I have not yet had the good fortune to meet with it.

Policy of the
present
Government.

It will not have escaped you that many steps taken by the present Government have been in the direction in which I have been saying that I should like to see the Liberal party desiring to be led. I need only point to the reduction of the sugar duties by Mr. Lowe, to the diminished naval and military estimates of 1870, to the withdrawal of the troops from the colonies, where they were not wanted, by Mr. Cardwell, to Lord Clarendon’s pacific policy in China, to Lord Ripon’s negotiations in America, to Mr. Baxter’s application of modern commercial practice to the purchases of the Admiralty, to Mr. Childers’ reforms, and so forth.

What I am anxious to see, and do not see, is, not any particular action on the part of the Government, but a desire in the party to make the Government lead it in a particular direction.

* Elgin Speeches. Edmonston & Douglas, 1871.

That, I say, is what I personally think would be the best thing for the country ; and just before the election of 1868, at the time of Mr. Bright's "free breakfast-table" speech in Edinburgh, I was sanguine enough to think that things might take that direction.

The above
my personal
views.

I am looking to the *nearest* future, not so sanguine now. Illness soon withdrew Mr. Bright, not only from the Government, but even from the councils of the nation. A great war, which statesmen had for four years been doing their utmost to stave off, in the hope—the just and legitimate hope—that something might turn up, in the chapter of accidents, to prevent it, at last broke out. When it had broken out, it was clear enough that eventualities connected with our treaty engagements might oblige us to take part in the contest. That necessitated some expenses being incurred, and some attention, which might have been directed more profitably, being transferred to military matters.

But not
sanguine as
to the nearest
future.

But that was not all. A large section of our population went mad with excitement. The whole thrice-hateful brood of panic-mongers yelled through the press. Publications like "The Battle of Dorking," and others which had not even the recommendation of being, like it, skilfully written, were sold by tens of thousands ; and unhappily it was just on the most vocal section of the public—on a portion of the literary class in the metropolis, and on "society"—that these publications had most effect. After the middle of November, it was

Unhappy
excitement
caused by
Franco-
German war.

difficult for any one living in London not to believe that the country really wanted to go to war with somebody or other, with a view to showing that the British Lion was as fierce and strong as of old. The Government, of course, never shared that illusion, and large numbers of Members of Parliament, on both sides, never shared it; but, at the same time, I am afraid the Government quite rightly interpreted the wish of the majority of the country in bringing in far larger estimates for the services than it was agreeable to some of its best friends to vote for.

Yet some good came out of this excitement.

Happily, the same wave of opinion which swept it in the direction of increased expenditure was also strong enough to hurl it against the evil system which had so long diminished the efficiency of our army, and made far-reaching reforms impossible. After a resistance to which the future historian will point as showing how deeply the mercenary taint had dyed the very souls of a certain portion of our society, down went the purchase system with its attendant abominations. It, I fear, could not have been got rid of except at the price we paid—six months of panic-mongering, and several months more of military, or rather of a much worse thing, half-military chatter.

Fall of the purchase system.

But all this threw us back.

But all this threw us back—a long way back—and it was clearly shown when the budget of this year was brought forward, that large divisions of the Liberal party, so far from being willing to take for their programme anything like what Mr.

Cobden would have approved, were entirely opposed to it—were all, for example, even for indirect as against direct taxation.

I am sorry for it, but the business of a politician in a popular Government is to use as best he may the existing gales and currents of public thought to carry him in the direction in which he would go. As Bolingbroke said long ago, "The ocean which environs us is an emblem of our Government, and the pilot and the minister are in similar circumstances. It seldom happens that either of them can steer a direct course, and they both arrive at their port by means which frequently seem to carry them from it."

Duty of a politician under present circumstances.

People are often unjustly called doctrinaires, because they have distinct ideas about politics, and have systems of policy in their heads to which from time to time they give expression; but those are only justly called doctrinaires who insist on acting in season and out of season upon the doctrines which they profess.

Who are the true doctrinaires?

If the nation wishes for the present rather to make itself, so to say, more comfortable where it is than go through the exertion of driving a stage forward even on the road of prosperity, the servants of the nation have nothing to do but to obey its behests. By all means let us have one or more sessions given to diminishing drunkenness, to preventing accidents in, and otherwise regulating mines, to passing an improved Merchant Shipping Code, to enabling the authorities to deal better with disease or the causes of disease, and so forth. These ques-

Period of social reform.

tions, taken each by itself, are of immense importance, but they can hardly be grouped into a connected whole in a way to seize the imagination, or form the basis of action for a party. They might, of course, be rhetorically represented as measures of which the common object was to turn the new force acquired by the vast addition lately made to the constituencies to the improvement of the general condition of the people. In fact, such a presentment of them by a practised orator might, if that orator were a leading Cabinet Minister, be an immense political service, for he might doubtless, so dispose and colour his materials as to give to perfectly sane views and reasonable aims something of that attractive appearance which seems to attach to the fantastic schemes of world-bettering about which we heard so much this autumn. To do that, however, would, as I have said, require the power of a great orator full of the enthusiasm of humanity. One is looking, perhaps, only at the other side of the shield; but for my part, I cannot help thinking that the first condition of world-bettering, even in this country, which is comparatively rich, is to increase material prosperity, while the second condition must be to diffuse sound instruction. Let us do all the other things that various sections of philanthropists propose. Above all, let us regulate the Liquor Traffic, supply efficient direction, and give adequate powers to the various sanitary agencies through the country, and improve, as far as we can, the dwellings of the town popu-

lation. But the first and great political commandment of the hour is—Make the people rich ; and the second, make them intelligent. There are periods in all our lives when we think rather of setting our houses in order than of entering upon any decided course of action ; but these periods do not last so very long with individuals, and the period on which we are now entering won't last so very long with the British people. Well, what next? I really do not see any choice between the programme I have been sketching and a programme of organic change. I do not think we shall have organic changes, because I believe that the various institutions, in which some change is required, will pretty readily agree to as much change as the nation will care to have for some time to come. As at present advised, then, I am inclined to think that the policy I have been trying to sketch is the policy, not, indeed, of to-morrow, but of the day after.

Build general intelligence on general wealth.

But what to come after period of social reform?

The Cobdenic policy, the policy of the day after to-morrow.

A friend said to me the other day, "But why is it necessary to be doing anything? Why cannot the Liberal party be satisfied with merely administering the country?" To such a question, the reply that our parliamentary system of Government practically necessitates changes is not a sufficient answer ; but this, I think, is a sufficient answer. Our present position is an illogical one ; we have broken with an old set of ideas, and we have not yet fully accommodated our policy to the new ideas which we hold.

Our present position an illogical one.

After some questions had been asked and answered, Bailie TAYLOR proposed, and Mr. JOHN ALLAN, corn merchant, seconded, a vote of thanks and confidence ; which being put by the Chairman, was declared duly carried.

